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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was administered to 50 gifted children (9 to 12 years old) to determine how students feel about the mildly retarded in a classroom setting. Based on the responses to the 10 questions, there seemed to be a very high belief that mildly retarded children will be socially accepted by their peers. The gifted group did not view the mildly retarded as hampering their academic achievement. Also, the gifted group believed that the mildly retarded would learn more if placed in class with regular students. Gifted Ss were willing to use their spare time to tutor the retarded as well as share teacher time for individual instruction for the retarded. (SB)

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HOW GIFTED CHILDREN FEEL ABOUT EDUCABLE CHILDREN IN AN EDUCATIONAL SETTING

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at the

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Statesboro, Georgia

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HOW GIFTED CHILDREN FEEL ABOUT EDUCABLE CHILDREN IN AN EDUCATIONAL SETTING

Introduction

The passage of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, has resulted in the placement of handicapped children in the "least restrictive environment." For some children who were formally segregated entirely from average and gifted boys and girls, this means regular class placement for a part of or the entire school day. The least restrictive alternative placement, which is frequently interpreted as mainstreaming, means that mildly or moderatley handicapped (retarded) children will be placed in the regular classroom. Mental retardation (Kirk, 1980, p.19) refers to significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period. Significantly, subaverage refers to performance which is more than two standards below the mean of the test utilized. Relative to school functioning, the educable mentally retarded student has the potential for personal, social, and emotional growth leading to independent, productive living.

Since Public Law 94-142 has mandated that mildly retarded children be educated as much as possible with their non-handicapped peers, their success in the classroom may be contingent on peer acceptance. As noted by Lombana (1980) handicapped students' success in school - personal, academic, and social - will be determined to a large extent by the attitudes and behaviors displayed by their

student peers. Another aspect of acceptance of the mildly retarded into the regular classroom situation is the classroom teacher. MacMillan, Meyers, and Yoshida (1978) reported that even when children are being mainstreamed in regular classes, teachers perceive them to be considerably below the class average in both social acceptance and academic achievement. In some instances the perceptions of the teacher may be incorrect pertaining to how boys and girls perceive and accept the mildly retarded when mainstreamed into the regular classroom.

Some of the positive features of mainstreaming have been proposed by Kaufman et al., (1975). The positive features include: (1) Removing the stigma associated with special placement, (2) enhancing the social status of exceptional learners with non-handicapped peers, (3) facilitating the modeling of appropriate behavior exhibited by non-handicapped children, and (4) providing a more cognitively stimulating school experience. If the positive effects propounded by Kaufman and his associates are to be beneficial for the mildly retarded, acceptance and socialization with gifted boys and girls should be an integral part of the process of mainstreaming.

The first step in this direction is to determine how gifted boys and girls feel about the mildly retarded in a classroom setting. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation was to ascertain the attitudes of children identified as gifted toward the mildly retarded.

A brief questionnaire containing 10 items was administered to the boys and girls over a two week period. Each child read the survey and circled the answers that reflected his/her feelings about the

question. When each child had completed a survey, a percentage count was determined for each response.

Subjects for this investigation were 50 boys and girls identified as gifted based on a measure I.Q. score of at least 128 on the Slosson Intelligence Test. All subjects were enrolled in the Georgia Southern College Laboratory School. The subjects' ages were distributed as follows: 9 year olds, 16 subjects; 10 year olds, 16 subjects; 11 year olds, 12 subjects; and 12 year olds, 2 subjects. The grade and the number of subjects in each grade were as follows: third graders, 7 subjects; fourth grade, 15 subjects; fifth graders, 13 subjects; sixth graders, 13 subjects and seventh graders, 2 subjects. There were 30 (62%) females and 19 (38%) males.

The administrative arrangement and the population of the school allow for heterogeneous grouping of children. Interclass grouping for skills, socialization, interest, etc. are determined by the needs of the children. Children with abilities ranging from very low through the gifted are together in one classroom most of the entire day. For example, in one class of 30 children there may be 10 students in the gifted program and two children obtaining additional ameolerative services from a resource room learning disability specialist. Boys and girls in the gifted program are provided enrichment opportunities approximately six hours a week through an itinerant resource teacher of the gifted. This heterogenity of the school's arrangement allows all children with special needs the opportunity to learn and interact with their normal peers.

Results of the Study

The questions from the questionnaire, children's responses in percentages, and comments, where appropriate, follows:

Question #1

Mentally retarded children should have classes with gifted and other children?

Yes 62%
No 38%

Comments: None

Question #2

Mentally retarded children should attend only lunch and physical education with the gifted?

Yes 20%
No 80%

Comments: Such activities as lunch, physical education and other non-academic components of the curriculum have been suggested as methods of maximizing the socialization of retarded with their non-retarded peers. Non-academic task involvement to improve socialization has been offered by Ballard, Corman, Gottlieb, and Kaufman (1977). This survey indicates that these boys and girls would be willing to accept their mildly retarded peers in other areas of the curriculum.

Question #3

Mentally retarded children would learn more if they were in classes with gifted and other children?

All day	50%
Half day	42%
None of the day	8%

Comments: Various arrangements have been suggested and are presently practiced for placing the mildly retarded in the least restrictive environment (Kirk, 1980, p. 19). That is, he should remain with his peers as much as possible. These results reflect the belief of the respondents that all day and half placement in the regular class would increase the retarded's learning or achievement.

Question #4

Would you be willing to tutor a retarded person in your spare time?

Yes 88%
No 12%

Comments: Peer tutoring has frequently been suggested as a means of providing interaction between the retarded while simultaneously increasing academic skills of the retarded. The willingness of a high percentage of the gifted to tutor could be evidence of their unselfishness and empathy. Ballard, et al. (1977) found the social acceptance of the mainstreamed mentally retarded improved when non-handicapped peers interacted with the mainstreamed child on highly structured manipulative tasks.

Question #5

Do you believe a classmate who is not very retarded but slow will keep you from learning all you can in a class?

Yes 20%
No 80%

Comments: It is a perpetual adage in education that homogeneity in grouping hampers the academic achievement of the ablest. That a high percentage of the respondents stated that it would not, reflects that gifted children view themselves as being somewhat "in charge" of their learning. This may be evident of their "internal locus of control" when it comes to learning and achieving.

Question #6

Where do you feel the mentally retarded should be educated?

At home	2%
At school	60%
Separate school	38%

Comments: That 60% responded "At school" probably reflects that these felt a more favorable environment would be at school.

Question #7

Have you had any classes with mentally retarded children?

Yes	24%	
No	42%	(Did not have contact)
Don't Know	34%	(May or may not have had contact with the M.R.)

Comments: None

Question #8

The mentally retarded student should study subjects like reading, math, science, and social studies with the gifted?

Yes 66%
No 34%

Comments: When the more traditional academic subjects are involved, the gifted (2/3) believed that the Mildly Retarded should take classes with their peers.

Question #9

If a person is so retarded he can't learn in a regular classroom, he should attend a special school paid for with public taxes?

Yes 90%
No 10%

Comments: The respondents answers to this question reflect a high degree of "moral" committment to helping the retarded.

Question #10

Would you become upset if your classroom teacher spent a little more time helping the mentally retarded student than you?

Yes 6%
No 94%

Comments: This question sought to solicit answers to questions often asked teachers. This question to reflects the concept that they control their learning and achievement, not the teacher or other boys and girls. Thus answering the question: Do my more able students feel they will suffer as a result of having the Mildly Retarded in the classroom.

Summary

Based on the responses of the subjects to the ten questions, there seems to be a very high belief that mildly retarded children will be accepted socially by their peers. The gifted group did not view the mildly retarded as hampering their academic achievement and causing them to achieve less in school. Too, the gifted group, believed that the mildly retarded would learn more if placed in classes with regular boys

and girls. The gifted's high moral beliefs and committment for helping the retarded is reflected in their willingness to use their spare time to tutor the retarded as well as shared teacher time for individual instruction for the retarded.

A few of the gifted subjects responded negatively toward some of the items relating to the mildly retarded. For children possessing negative attitudes toward the mildly retarded children, Gottlieb (1980) conducted research which indicates that a general discussion of the mildly retarded is an effective method of changing attitudes. This informational influence paradign may be used with individuals or groups. Social psychologists Krech, Crutchfield, and Ballachey (1962), suggested that attitude change is brought about through exposure to additional information and direct experience with the object. These are just two approaches to helping the gifted understand the mildly retarded.

Also if this approach is to be used in altering attitudes toward the mildly retarded the concept of exceptionality as expounded by Lilly (1980) would be helpful. This explanation focuses on exceptional situations in the schools rather than the child being exceptional. His proposed definition states "An exceptional school situation is one in which interaction between a student and his teacher has been limited to such an extent that external intervention is deemed necessary by the teacher to cope with the problem." By focusing on the school situation, the stigma associated with the term "retarded" are eliminated.

A method used by Westervelt and McKinney (1980) offers a supplementary component for effecting attitude changes. Films may be used to illustrate that mildly retarded children have the same emotional, social,

and physical needs as normal and gifted boys and girls. As McKinney cautions, the film alone may not be sufficient and time must be allowed for questions and answers. The teacher and her attitude toward the mainstreamed mildly retarded will certainly have an effect on the attitude of her children.

In conclusion, gifted children in this study exhibited positive responses toward the retarded. Their responses reflect a very high degree of moral equality for the mildly retarded. For those children possessing negative attitudes, there are procedures which the classroom teacher can use to effect attitude changes. This study reveals that the gifted will readily accept their mildly retarded peers in the regular classroom.

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